721 pillow and fired twice at a shadowy figure which darted out of the tent, and then gave the alarm. The emergency floodlights were switched on, and shortly afterwards a truckload of Indian troops reached the camp and began to fire into the darkness, but the raiders had fled. In the morning it was discovered that hundreds of blankets, sheets, provisions and some hospital equipment, including chairs, had been stolen. There was a piece of bloodstained cloth on the barbed-wire, suggesting that one of the raiders had been winged. We felt rather sorry for the M.O., but could not help smiling at the thief's impudence in attempting to steal his blanket while he slept.

694 The Sheikh of Sharjah was approached by the Political Officer and told politely that he would be held responsible for the raid, since it had occurred on his territory. As the value of the stolen goods totalled something like £100, Sultan bin Saqr decided very
694 quickly that something must be done. Like many of the sheikhs,
151 he employs several skilled trackers. These men are the detectives of the desert, and have an uncanny knack of hounding down a criminal. Footprints mean everything to them, and it is said that they can tell the age of a camel, and the district to which it belongs, from the shape of its spoor. They can distinguish the feet of a woman from those of a man, and even reconstruct from the depth of a foot-impression what a person was doing at a particular time; they can also assess fairly accurately when the footprints were made. In his *Alarms and Excursions*, Bertram Thomas tells an amusing story which illustrates the trackers' skill; it was first told to me by Haji Williams, an old English adventurer who has spent fifty years in the desert and has now turned Mohammedan and married an Arab wife.

The incident occurred in Bahrain. An old Arab merchant was very worried about the non-return of his daughter from the market. As she did not return that night, the following day he hired a professional tracker and told him to find her. The tracker soon came upon the footprints of the merchant's daughter, but by the side of them he also found a thin trail in the sand, as if made by some kind of blunt instrument. At first he was puzzled, then enlightenment came to him, and he returned to the merchant to inform him that his daughter had spent the night in the desert with a man. The merchant was so shocked and enraged at hearing this that when eventually his daughter put in an appearance he refused to allow her to enter his house. Falling on her knees,

she pleaded that no man had been near her that night. On being questioned, she admitted that she had stopped to gather some *fagar* on the way home, darkness had fallen and she had lost her way. She had spent the night most respectably, sleeping under a neam tree. (To understand this incident, it should be explained that the *fagar* is a kind of edible fungus, much liked by the Arabs, and that in shape it curiously resembles the phallus.)

The trackers employed by the Sheikh of Sharjah were reputed to be the cleverest in Arabia. That afternoon I had gone for a walk to the Sheikh's Wells, a delightful spot about two miles from the fort, whence we obtained our water supply. The area is covered with flower and vegetable gardens, and guarded by one of the round stone watch-towers which one finds on the outskirts of most Arab towns. The Sheikh and his Ministers arrived in a smart Hudson automobile, followed by the Khan Bahadur, Abdur bin Razzak, in his sedan. They were met by two trackers on camels, and proceeded to hold a conference.

Fifteen minutes later the trackers set off for the hospital, picked up the tracks of the raiders, and were soon galloping off in the desert at a smart pace in the direction of Baraimi. This is a small market town in the middle of a trackless desert. The territory is not claimed by any sheikh, although several have tried to possess it. For hundreds of years it has remained neutral ground, and its famous date plantations represent the only example of co-operation among the tribes, for each has a share in the crop. Baraimi is not only a centre for the slave trade, but is a refuge for criminals.

We heard later that the raiders had been traced to Dhaid, but that the trackers had been unable to arrest them. They were in hiding with about a hundred other brigands, and there are limits to the courage of a tracker. Compensation for the thefts was paid to the R.A.F. authorities, and it was a rather curious fact that, several months later, sheets and blankets, bearing the R.A.F. tabs, were found in local houses.

Desert raiders are usually the 'bad boys' of their tribe, and their conduct does not always reflect the character of the tribe as a whole. Some tribes pride themselves on their honesty and deal very sternly with offenders. If a tribesman of the Beni Qitab is caught in the act of stealing or raiding, the Sheikh Mahomed, the patriarch who rules this tribe, will make himself personally responsible for the thief's apprehension and punishment. This may take the form of amputating the right arm, branding, or the more barbarous punish-